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THE World Council of Churches

WHAT IT IS
AND
WHAT IT DOES

JUN 18 1956

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Plenary session, Second Assembly, World Council of Churches, McGaw Hall, Evanston, Illinois, August 1954.

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THE World Council of Churches

A new unity is developing among the Churches of the world. Of that unity the World Council of Churches is the organizational expression.

The World Council is a fellowship of Churches which recognize that they have a common Lord and therefore come together for the purpose of cooperating in common tasks, bearing a common witness, and moving toward a fuller manifestation of their unity. 162 denominations in 47 nations are thus united in the World Council of Churches. They have a combined membership of 170,000,000 persons.

The Churches which comprise the Council represent an amazing variety of national and racial cultures. They are drawn from all five continents of the earth and the islands of the seas. They include bodies as old as the Churches of Jerusalem and of Antioch, dating from New Testament times, and as young as a Bantu Church of South Africa which came into being in 1954.

The Churches of the World Council are also extremely diverse in forms of organization and worship. They are as different as the Eastern Orthodox, with their elaborate liturgy and priesthood, and the Quakers with their

simple informality. They all increasingly find, however, that the things which they share with one another by reason of their common relation to Christ are of far greater moment than the things which have kept them apart.

The historic families which are officially represented in the World Council of Churches include

Anglican (Episcopal)	Lutheran
Baptist	Mennonite
Brethren	Methodist
Congregational	Moravian
Coptic	Old Catholic
Disciples	Presbyterian
Eastern Orthodox	Reformed
Evangelical	Salvation Army
Friends	United

By its own choice the Roman Catholic Church is not represented. The Orthodox Church of Russia has also not as yet seen fit to join.

The kind of unity which this new movement represents is indicated by the three words which are found in its name: World Council of Churches. It is *world-wide,* not merely national or Western. It is a *council,* a voluntary association, not a super-church or a legislative authority. It is made up of *Churches* in their life as a whole, not merely of individual Christians. It came into official existence in 1948 at a great assembly of the Churches in Amsterdam, Holland, although for a decade previously it had been in operation through a provisional committee. As a result of the second assembly, held in Evanston, Illinois, in 1954, an enlarged program is now under way.

SERVING WORLD-WIDE NEEDS TOGETHER

The Christian unity which the World Council signalizes is not just a matter of theoretical principle: it is manifested in practical undertakings. Especially in the Division of Interchurch Aid and Service to Refugees is there a visible demonstration of a spirit of unity translated into a program of mutual helpfulness reaching across both national and denominational lines.

Presidents of the World Council. Standing: Bishop F. K. Otto Dibelius of the Evangelical Union of Berlin-Brandenburg, Germany; Bishop Sante Uberto Barbieri, Methodist Bishop in Argentina, Uruguay and Bolivia; Mar Thoma Juhanon, Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of the Malabar, South India; The Very Rev. John Baillie, Church of Scotland; Presiding Bishop Henry Knox Sherrill of the Protestant Episcopal Church, U.S.A.; seated: Dr. G. K. A. Bell, Bishop of Chichester, an honorary president; Archibishop Michael of the Eastern Orthodox Churches in North and South America.

Here are convincing indications that the Church, in spite of its divisions, is sufficiently one Body so that "if one member suffer, all suffer with it."

The World Council's service to refugees is a well established ministry to human need. The refugees served are of two kinds: (1) those who are both homeless and stateless as a result of their oppression under totalitarian regimes; (2) those who, though still in their native countries (as in Korea), have been made homeless on a vast scale by war and political tensions.

The World Council has helped to resettle more stateless refugees than any other voluntary organization. During 1955 alone 12,421 persons, chiefly from Eastern Europe, were resettled in new homes in the United States, Australia, Canada, South American countries and still other lands. For

carrying out its merciful ministry to refugees the Council has representatives in 41 countries.

There is also a program of physical and spiritual comfort for refugees who are still waiting for an opportunity to emigrate. Still further, there are those too aged or too ill to begin life again in other lands, for whose care special provision in institutions must be made. 425 of these handicapped refugees were established in permanent homes in Europe in 1955. For pastors and church workers broken in health by long misfortune there is a rest centre, Casa Locarno, in Switzerland. The Arab refugees, nearly 900,000 (chiefly Moslems) living in miserable camps, are included in the World Council's program of compassion.

Many other forms of humanitarian service are carried on, including assistance to those overwhelmed by natural disasters or dire emergencies. In 1953 the victims of earthquakes in Greece were aided. In 1954 the rehabilitation of war sufferers in Korea was a major enterprise, when food, clothing and medicaments to the value of $2,800,000 were contributed. Over 1100 Korean amputees have been provided with new limbs. In 1955 ruinous floods in India, Pakistan and Laos have called for material assistance.

In Kenya a program for the rehabilitation of Mau Maus has been begun, with a staff of eight already at work in 1955. In Europe the need of the Churches in East Germany, where it is still possible to provide a measure of help to pastors, has had high priority.

In Turkey the riots of September 6, 1955, in Istanbul, which destroyed most of the Orthodox Churches and badly damaged homes and shops of Greek residents, were an occasion for immediate help. A member of the World Council's staff flew to Istanbul to survey the need and consult with church leaders. A program of immediate relief was begun, and subsequently a special fund of $75,000 for the Ecumenical Patriarchate was launched.

So far as possible the Division of Interchurch Aid and Service to Refugees fulfills its function without setting up extensive administrative operations of its own. Its main role is that of coordinator of efforts which would otherwise be sporadic and unrelated. Its chief method is that of being alert to needs and of stimulating the Churches to cooperative efforts. The total service to which the World Council is thus related in an advisory and

coordinating way, exceeded $33,000,000 in 1955, — including the value of material supplies handled in association with Church World Service, U.S.A.

Still another form of interchurch aid is the "ecumenical scholarships" which have enabled more than 1300 students for the ministry to have a year of training in another country than their own. For the year 1955-1956 119 such scholarships have been provided for students from 25 countries. 36 of these are enrolled in seminaries of the U.S.A. and are under the oversight of the National Council of Churches.

A different type of interchurch aid, still in an initial stage, is the Ecumenical Loan Fund. To date it has granted 400 small loans, involving about $400,000, for help in building places of worship, parish centers and other

Gifts from churches of many countries helped make possible this "refugee church" in South Korea.

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these — "

institutions. As loans are repaid the fund becomes available for other purposes and is thus used over and over.

Although the program of interchurch aid was begun as an emergency measure in the wake of war, it has now become clear that mutual support on a world-wide basis is a permanent obligation of the Churches. In a world in which great need always exists somewhere it is both their duty and their

privilege to find the practical means by which to "bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ."

After a decade of experience the Council now thinks of interchurch aid in broader terms than the relief of those in need. It is an expression of fellowship and of mutuality in the life of the Christian family as a whole. It is a way of manifesting a solidarity among groups of Christians who together make up one Body of Christ's people throughout the world.

Important aspects of Christian strategy — quite apart from financial considerations, — are involved in the acceptance of interchurch aid as a permanent obligation. Four are worth special notice:

1. Developing cooperation between two great branches of Christendom, — the Protestant and the Eastern Orthodox. A striking evidence of this was seen in the international "mission of fellowship", sent to the Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul in November, 1955, following the riots in which the Orthodox had suffered grievously.
2. Lending moral and spiritual support to struggling Protestant minorities. To groups like the Waldensians in Italy, or the Evangelicals in Spain and Colombia, for example, it is a tremendous asset to know, through first-hand contacts, that they do not stand alone. When the only Evangelical Seminary in Spain was closed by governmental order in January 1956, the World Council of Churches sent a delegation of inquiry to Madrid. Announcement of the rescinding of the order came not many weeks later.
3. Maintaining such contacts with Churches behind the Iron Curtain as are possible. This is combined with an uncompromising rejection of Communist ideology as alien to Christianity. Personal contacts were possible in 1955 with a few Christian leaders of East Germany, Czecho-Slovakia and Hungary. In all such contacts the basic concern is to keep the Churches behind the Iron Curtain from being isolated from their fellow-Christians in the West and insulated from the influences of world-wide Christianity.
4. Fostering relations of complete mutuality between the Churches of the West and the Churches of Asia and Africa. The Churches which have come into being as a result of foreign missionary effort are now eager to be regarded as full partners with the Churches of the West. The World Council has arisen at a crucial time for furthering such a fellowship. The proposal to hold its next assembly (in 1960) in Ceylon is an indication of the key place of the Churches of the East in the Council.

By placing its first emphasis on interchurch aid and service to refugees the World Council has made it plain that its central concern is not for ecclesiastical or organizational interests but for a ministry to the need of the world in the name and spirit of Christ.

Girl workers leave the government cotton factory at Mahala-el-Cobra, Egypt. Only recently have women of Egypt given up their veils.

Chinese refugee children at school in Hong Kong. Hardship does not quench their thirst for education.

At Elat, French Cameroon, six operations are carried on simultaneously by trained technicians under guidance of one doctor.

FACING WORLD-WIDE ISSUES TOGETHER

The World Council's second emphasis is on study. In times like these the Churches in all parts of the world need to discern clearly what are the critical issues for Christian faith and life and to gain as much agreement as possible in meeting them. That is why the Evanston Assembly in 1954 established a Division of Studies on a permanent basis.

The programs of study are not prompted by an interest in academic research. They aim directly at finding what should be done and at getting it done by the concerted action of Christian people. Study in this sense is a vital means for the stimulus and renewal of the Church.

The study which the Council promotes is a world-wide process whereby Christians of different traditions and different historical circumstances think seriously about problems affecting them all. This study is carried on in part, but only in part, by the printed page and the written word. It involves also consultations, conferences and other forms of face-to-face meeting, all the way from small groups in local communities to international gatherings.

The study program follows three major lines: (1) the role of the Church in society, (2) the world-wide mission and evangelism of the Church, (3) the unity of the Church.

In the first of these fields the main project is a three-year study of "The Common Christian Responsibility toward Areas of Rapid Social Change". The focus of attention is those countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America where peoples have awakened to a new sense of human rights and justice and

In Thailand traditional farm operations are carried on side by side with the use of the most modern equipment.

freedom and are in revolt against conditions which deny human dignity. In many areas the processes of social, political and economic development which in the West have taken centuries are being compressed into decades.

While the Churches may not be competent to contribute much on the technical side of the problem they cannot avoid the challenge of misery and injustice in the economically underdeveloped areas. On the side of basic ethical attitudes and human understanding the Churches can make a distinctive contribution. In most of Asia and Africa the Christian groups are small but their influence on political, economic and social developments is quite out of proportion to their size.

The study of rapid social change has a two-fold thrust. The first is to help the Churches in Asia and Africa in a constructive and critical examination of their attitudes and action in relation to the current challenge. The second is to help Christians in the West to appreciate their responsibility in relation to the Asian and African peoples.

Four concrete issues of primary interest have emerged in the early stages of this study of areas of rapid social change:

- the service of the Church in developing responsible citizenship.
- the effects of urbanization and industrialization on social goals and human values.
- the Christian task in the rebuilding of village and rural life.
- the impact of foreign enterprise and international assistance in economically underdeveloped countries.

Another study project has been outlined on the subject, "Christians and the Prevention of War in an Atomic Age". This difficult inquiry on a controversial theme is prompted by the feeling that the results of nuclear research add a new dimension to the problem of war which the Christian conscience cannot avoid. The study approaches the issue primarily from the angle of Christian theology and ethics, but in consultation with scientists, historians and laymen of political and military experience. The central question is what effect the uncontrolability of atomic warfare should have upon the Christian's attitude toward it.

In the field of evangelism and the mission of the Church one of the main studies is concerned with Christianity in relation to non-Christian religions in the East. That there is a contemporary resurgence of Buddhism, Hinduism

and Islam, within a context of fervent nationalisms and a mood of independence from Western culture, is generally agreed. The projected study is not considering these religions as formal systems but as forces affecting the lives of millions of people today. Involved in the study is the relation of Christian faith and the revelation in Christ to religious faith in general.

This study is being carried on in collaboration with the International Missionary Council, with which the World Council of Churches is intimately associated. Another study initiated by the International Missionary Council has to do with the life and growth of the "younger Churches" which have developed in the last 150 years as result of the missionary movement. A study of the Church in Uganda is under way. Similar studies are projected for India and New Guinea. Special attention is given to the encounter of the new Churches with the environing cultures of Africa and Asia.

Directed particularly to the situation in the West is a study of the evangelism of the Church. It has to do with fundamental principles more than with methods, aiming to point out the essential conditions which a church must meet in order to be faithful and fruitful in its central task. It is hoped that certain pioneering efforts in evangelism, which are "breaking through" to groups outside the usual reach of the Church, — e.g. workers in highly industrialized areas, — may be helpfully high-lighted. Included in this study is an inquiry into the relation of the Church's ministry of healing to its proclamation of the Gospel.

Participants in Second World Conference on Faith and Order, Edinburgh, 1937.

The third broad area of study has to do with the unity of the Church. The primary assumption is that the Church of Christ, having but one Head, is essentially one and that it is the duty of all Christians to share in the effort to overcome the barriers which today separate the Churches and lead to misunderstanding and breaches of Christian fellowship. Five long-range studies are under way, seeking answers to the following five questions:

1. What is the nature of the Church as understood in the light of our doctrines of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit?
2. How, in the diversity of ways of worship, can we have a greater sense of togetherness in the adoration of the one God, Creator and Father of us all?
3. What is the relation of the common history and central tradition of all the Churches to our separate histories and traditions as denominations?
4. To what extent are our problems of unity due not to deep convictions as to the faith or order of the Church but to social, political, racial, economic and cultural factors that influence our practice as institutions?
5. How are we to deal rightly with the question of proselytism, — more particularly as between the Christian groups which are members of the World Council?

In order to bridge the wide gap between the specialized scholars in this field and the local churches, encouragement is being given to regional and national studies and conferences. One such conference was held in New Zealand in 1955. Careful plans are now being made for a North American conference, preceded by two years of preparatory study, in September 1957 on

the campus of Oberlin College. The theme is "The Nature of the Unity We Seek".

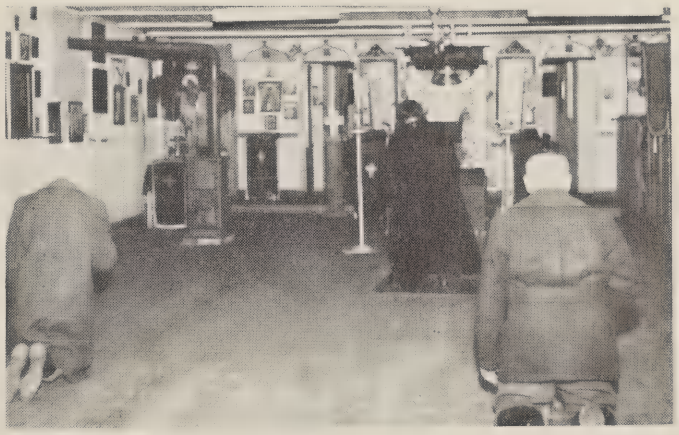
The topic is of decisive importance because of the different ways of conceiving unity which are prevalent. To some it involves primarily agreement in doctrine. To others it means sacramental communion, based on a common church order. To still others the heart of unity is found in cooperation in common tasks on the part of bodies that are conscious of a spiritual fellowship with one another. The Oberlin Conference is therefore designed to help answer such questions as these:

How much agreement in doctrine is essential for a united Church, — and in what relation to freedom for differing interpretations?

How much agreement as to the structure and ordering of the Church is essential for a united body, — and in what relation to diverse forms of organization?

How is the unity which Christians already have to be made more effective in the local community?

Such questions as these assume that there is a vital difference between unity and uniformity, between diversity and division, and stimulate an effort to clarify the difference. Sixteen study groups in sixteen centers of the United States and Canada are carrying on intensive inquiries along these lines, each addressing itself to specific aspects of the general question, in preparation for the North American conference of official delegates of forty denominations.



At Camp Valka, Germany, Orthodox refugees from many European countries find comfort in this barracks church, made possible through the World Council of Churches.

LAY PEOPLE ACTING TOGETHER

As the Division of Studies emphasizes problems which need light, so the Division of Ecumenical Action emphasizes tasks that need doing. The rather unfamiliar adjective "ecumenical", (which means "pertaining to the whole household of faith") affirms that these tasks need to be done unitedly by Christians of all theological and ecclesiastical backgrounds and of all nations and races.

Youth are a primary concern for they will determine the character of the Church of tomorrow. As a means of training them to understand and appreciate Christians of different denominational and cultural traditions, a series of "ecumenical work camps" is sponsored each summer. Here Christian young people from many lands and Churches live together for several weeks, working together at useful manual labor, praying together and studying together the meaning of their common faith.

In 1955 nearly a thousand young people (137 of them from the U.S.A.) participated in 30 such camps in 20 countries of Europe, Asia, North America and South America. Typical of them were the camp in Norway, where an international Christian group helped the people in a new housing area to build a small church, and the camp in Bethlehem, in the Holy Land, where young workers helped with the digging and terracing for a playground at an orphanage-school. So popular have the work camps become that for 1956 forty are planned.

A simpler plan by which young people of the Churches share in a still wider program of mutual helpfulness across national, racial and denominational lines is "world youth projects". A careful list is prepared of pioneering undertakings in which Christian youth in one country are concerned and in which they welcome assistance from youth of other countries. As a typical instance, the establishment of an inter-racial conference center at Wilgespruit in South Africa, — one of the few places where white and Bantu young people can meet together, — has been aided by the Christian Youth Council of Ohio. The amounts of money involved in the world youth projects are not large but their spiritual significance may prove to be great.

Other ways in which youth enter into an experience of enlarging Christian fellowship are conferences in different parts of the world. In 1955 a conference was held at Canterbury in which English young people of the Estab-

lished and the Free Churches, with invited guests from other lands, discussed issues of church unity. A conference in Beirut brought together delegates from both Orthodox and Protestant Churches in the Near East with special emphasis on training youth leaders. Still another conference was held in Spain for Protestant youth of Latin countries.

The training of lay people in a fuller understanding both of the Church as a world community and of their own responsibility in it is another major objective. In several areas,—Germany, for example,—a revival of interest in lay activities is observable. The World Council furthers this development, believing that the most powerful Christian witness is that of faithful men and women in their daily occupations. It is serving as a clearing-house for lay programs, encouraging experiments and disseminating information about them.

Indo-China, Great Britain and South Africa were among the nations represented at this ecumenical work camp at Glay, France.

A special problem in the field of the laity is the relation between men and women, both in the Church and in society at large. This is a social and human issue of great magnitude. In many Churches the status of women is far from satisfactory and their potential leadership is not being fully used. The increasing cooperation of men and women, under arrangements whereby both will contribute their particular gifts to the common life, is therefore a subject of educational effort.

The most distinctive feature of the training of both laity and ministers is the Ecumenical Institute, located in the Chateau de Bossey in charming rural surroundings overlooking Lake Geneva, twelve miles from the city of Geneva. The spacious estate was a gift of Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

The Institute serves two main purposes. The first is as a permanent center of conferences where Christians of different national and denominational traditions learn from one another, gain deeper insights into the Christian faith and discover the wider horizons of the Church. They also derive practical benefits of increased knowledge and skills from the guidance of the

Women leaders hold an interdenominational meeting at the Gold Coast Christian Council.

The Ecumenical Institute at Chateau de Bossey, Celigny (near Geneva), Switzerland.

Institute's staff, representing different Churches and cultures, and from an exchange of experiences with one another. There have been recent conferences of lay leaders, of theological students, of workers in rural churches, of ministers, of missionaries on furlough, and of Christian social workers. Some of the most creative gatherings have been the seminars which have brought together people from the same profession to consider how to make Christian faith more effective in their daily work and contacts. Such conferences have been held for journalists, for educators, for physicians, for lawyers, for leaders in labor-management relations. Essential parts of every conference, on whatever theme or for whatever group, are daily worship and Bible study.

For five months of the year the Institute conducts a Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies in association with the University of Geneva. The central interests are theology, church history, and the contemporary situation in the Church, all approached from a world-wide perspective. Credit for courses completed is given by the University of Geneva when the necessary academic requirements are met. In the year 1955-1956 thirty-three students from thirteen countries and from all five continents are enrolled in the Graduate School.

CHRISTIAN WITNESS TO THE NATIONS

Most of the work of the World Council is related, in one way or another, to the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs. This is the instrument through which the 162 denominations which are members of the World Council and the 32 National Christian Councils which are members of the International Missionary Council are beginning to make a common impact on problems of world justice, reconciliation and peace. The chief purpose is to develop a Christian mind on world issues and to bring that mind to bear on governmental agencies and world opinion.

This involves continuous contacts with the United Nations, its personnel, and its specialized agencies. This is a responsibility which cannot be handled by separate Churches of different countries. The fact that the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs represents Christian bodies with a combined membership of 170,000,000 gives it a unique position. It is recognized by the United Nations as having a consultative status, which means that channels are always open for presentation of Christian concerns.

The part which the Commission played in the drafting of the article on religious liberty in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an interesting illustration. In its initial form the article had only a general phrase about freedom of belief and worship. Largely as a result of representations made by the Commission of the Churches the conditions of a full exercise of religious liberty were identified and incorporated into the final draft, which reads as follows:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

Other issues on which the Commission has made effective representations to appropriate authorities of the United Nations include

more adequate international action in behalf of refugees;

the establishment of "Peace Observation Commissions" in areas of special tension, such as Korea and the Near East;

stronger support of the program of technical assistance to the people in economically underdeveloped countries.

International problems are so complex and difficult that considerable specialized knowledge and expertness, as well as good will, are requisite in those who are to make any significant contribution. The Commission of the Churches undertakes the kind of continuous research that enables it to approach its concrete tasks with intelligent understanding. It maintains contacts with key leadership in Churches all over the world and when "trouble spots" appear a representative of the Commission is likely to be on hand. Among recent visits of the director were the following:

in Seoul during the Korean armistice negotiations;
in Cyprus for contacts with British and Greek Christian leaders;
in Geneva for the "summit meeting" of heads of state;
in Berlin for the meeting of the four foreign ministers;
in Geneva during the conference on peaceful uses of atomic energy;
in India and Pakistan, in Burma and Thailand, in Indonesia and Japan, in consultation with Christian leaders.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower with church leaders, after he addressed the World Council Assembly at Evanston.

ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT

The central headquarters of the World Council of Churches are in Geneva, Switzerland. The responsibilities have so outgrown the inadequate offices that an effort is now being made to raise $750,000 to provide a new office building, a library and a chapel. Of this amount $300,000 is being contributed directly by the Churches for the first unit, with hopes that individual friends and foundations will make up the balance.

An Asian office is maintained in Madras (jointly with the International Missionary Council) for the sake of closer contact with the Younger Churches, which are every year becoming an increasingly important and active part of the World Council.

An office in New York, at 156 Fifth Ave., serves the interests of the 32 member Churches in the U.S.A. and keeps them in constant touch not only with the headquarters in Geneva but also with the work of the Council around the world.

Only a small part of the activities of the Council, however, are carried on in its offices. Its work is spread over the earth. Wherever a member of the staff is helping refugees in Germany or Hongkong, wherever a struggling church in Turkey or Pakistan is receiving aid from sister-churches in more favored positions, wherever a youth camp in Brazil or Greece brings Christian youth of the world together in Christian fellowship, wherever the basic oneness of Christians manifests itself in any common program, there the World Council of Churches is making its influence felt.

The general policies and program of the World Council are determined by its assembly, made up of the official delegates of the 162 cooperating denominations meeting once in six years. The first was held in Europe in 1948; the second, in the U.S.A. in 1954. The third, scheduled for 1960, will probably meet in Asia. In the interim between assemblies a Central Committee, made up of 90 members meeting annually, is responsible for the supervision of all the Council's work. The United States Conference for the World Council of Churches, consisting of the official representatives of the American denominations which are members of the World Council, carries on educational and promotional activities in its behalf in this country.

The basic administrative budget of the World Council of Churches for 1956, not including inter-church aid, service to refugees, and other forms of relief is $453,000. This is contributed directly by the member Churches in proportion to their ability. Of this amount the American Churches provide $310,000.

In addition to this fixed annual amount for administration contributions are invited for two types of designated support. The first of these is for inter-church aid and service to refugees and other forms of relief of suffering. The extent of the gifts for this purpose depends on conditions of need and response. The second object of designated gifts is projects covering a limited period, such as new undertakings in the field of study like the three-year inquiry into "The Common Christian Responsibility toward Areas of Rapid Social Change". The complete auditors' statement of income and expenditures (in Swiss Francs and American dollars) will be furnished on request.

For the educational and promotional work of the U. S. Conference of the World Council an extra budget of approximately $70,000 is contributed by individual friends, who thereby become members of "Friends of the World Council of Churches, Inc.".

The work of the World Council in all its aspects is evidence that there is a unity among the Churches that lies at a deeper level than all the divisions. That unity is due to a common relationship to one Lord and Saviour. To manifest that unity more fully today and to deepen it for tomorrow is the central purpose for which the World Council of Churches exists.

THE World Council
of Churches

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

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